

Water Conservation Needs To Be Everyday

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

We've been hearing a lot lately about water conservation and water conservation plans. The only question I have is why are we just now talking about it? We should be talking about water conservation EVERY day of every year! We waste a lot of water. We waste it in our homes, we waste it in our yards, we waste it every single day. It doesn't matter if there is a mandatory water watch or water emergency, we should be trying to conserve water every day!

I gripe every year about the amount of water that is wasted in yards, especially lawn watering. I am not opposed to people watering their lawns. I am opposed to people doing it in such a manner that they are wasting water and doing their grass little or no good. I see very few lawns that are being properly watered. It's easy to say because if they were being properly watered, I would probably never see the sprinklers running.

Water saving tip #1: Stop running sprinklers in your yard during mid day, afternoon and evening. The notion that watering a lawn in the afternoon will help cool it down is nonsense! It may cool you down when you walk by it, but the impact on the lawn is negligible. Same thing for watering anything in your yard or garden during the heat of the day. Sprinklers are a great way to get lots of leaves in the garden wet and make them highly susceptible to foliar diseases. Gardens are best watered at ground level. Sending water into the air with a sprinkler causes excessive water losses due to evaporation. Keep water for gardens and flowers on the ground!

Water saving tip #2: If you water your lawn, water deeply and only a couple times a week. Watering a little bit every day does not succeed in helping grass plants develop deep root systems. Plants develop roots where there's moisture. It takes about an inch of rainfall or irrigation to soak up 6 inches of soil. If you are running sprinklers just a little bit every morning, then you only wet the top inch, maybe, of the lawn soil. That means that the roots will concentrate there and if we do get into a more serious mandatory water conservation mode, your lawn will be in big trouble. Put out rain gauges so you know how much water you apply!

We are experiencing typical Kansas summer conditions. You can keep your lawn very healthy by watering twice a week with at least a half inch of water on each irrigation. Your lawn may show a little bit of stress, but it will stay alive and when cooler weather returns or a rainy period, it will look just fine. Part of the problem is that too many homeowners try to make their lawns look perfect all the time. Our cool season grasses natural tendency is to go at least partially dormant in the summertime so quit trying to make your lawn do something abnormal!

Water saving tip #3: Learn how to work your sprinkler system. Learn how to turn it off. If we have a one inch rainfall event, shut the sprinklers off for one week. It drives me crazy to drive down the street the morning after a good rain and see sprinklers running. It's a waste of water and money. Learn to go our with a big screwdriver and see how far down into the soil you can push it. That's a good way to know how wet the ground is.

We had watering restrictions in the 1980s. We may have to do this again. Lawns can go dormant and recover fairly quickly. It's more important to water trees and shrubs, which take longer to become established, then a lawn which we can replant and have up and going in a few months. For more information on water conservation in the home landscape come by the Extension Office or visit <http://www.kansasgreenyards.org/> on the web.